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Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is announcing the integration of management and operations of its Grand Island and Lincoln, Neb., VA Medical Centers.

A potential merger of the two facilities, which have complementary missions and services and a history of collaboration, has been under discussion for some time.

John T. Carson, director of the Veterans Integrated Service Network in Omaha, said, "VA is in the business of showing the nation's appreciation to its veterans by providing high quality health care across the full continuum of services. This integration will improve access and coordination of care for Nebraska's veterans by merging the strengths and missions of two fine VA medical centers."

David Asper, acting director of the integrated facilities, said: "Integration makes sense when you consider advances in technology and the improvements made in the delivery of health care through the practice of primary care and enhancement of outpatient services. By combining the resources of the two medical centers, we will be in a better position to improve quality and increase efficiency."

Since a local steering committee was formed last fall, the veterans community has been involved in the integration planning. Subcommittees have been formed to address such issues as clinical services, administrative functions, transportation and employee relations. In addition to VA staff members and employee union representatives, the panels will include representatives of veterans' service organizations as well as the Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs. This community partnership will continue with expanded working groups and implementation teams as the integration unfolds.

The Grand Island VA Medical Center focuses on ambulatory and extended-care services while providing limited inpatient medical care. The Lincoln VA Medical Center provides acute medical, surgical and psychiatric care.

Both facilities, which are 100 miles apart, have already developed a transportation system of volunteer and employee drivers to assist veterans in getting access to care at the community-based VA clinic in North Platte and the two medical centers.

An evaluation and monitoring plan has been developed to measure patient and employee satisfaction, the amount of resources redirected to patient care, quality improvement and improved access to care.

The Lincoln-Grand Island merger follows the successful experience of 34 VA medical facilities at 16 other locations throughout the United States within the last two years. The increased emphasis by health-care providers nationwide on providing integrated ambulatory and primary care services has resulted in greater access, better quality of care, improved customer satisfaction and reduced administrative costs by eliminating duplication. Any savings derived will be used to improve direct care for patients.